Analysis of How Adaptability Contributes to Terrorist Longevity

by

Shannon M. Lehmkuhl

Henley-Putnam University

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Mr. Gary F Bowser, Committee Chair

Dr. Diane Maye, Ph.D. (ABD), Subject Matter Expert

Dr. Denise Greaves, Ph.D., Committee Member

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Abstract

Historically, some domestic terror organizations—such as the Red Army and the Red Brigades—have faded away while some nations—such as El Salvador and Nicaragua—have managed to integrate or compromise with their domestic terror organizations. Meanwhile, other terrorist organizations—such as the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC)—have been remarkably enduring. Some nations dealing with long-term domestic terrorism appear unable to resolve their conflicts, despite efforts to bring them to a resolution. These conflicts have ultimately negatively impacted the socio-political-economic aspects of the nations. Research suggests that adaptability has been a key factor in the longevity of these long-term domestic terror organizations. Examination of the Basque Fatherland and Liberty (ETA) in Spain and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in Turkey, determined that each organization made substantive adaptive decisions in five categories contributing to their longevity. These categories are: actions during formative years; actions in the face of a new government; making alliances; engagement in criminal endeavors; and engaging ethnic support. Therefore, this study concludes that the ability of a domestic terror organization to adapt to its surroundings has led to the longevity of such terrorist organizations as the ETA and PKK. Recognizing those activities that have been identified as key adaptive decisions in past organizations could aid governments and law enforcement entities in taking measures to halt the course of emergent terrorist organizations.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Countering terrorism is akin to taking a series of time-lapse photographs. The image captured on film today is not the same as the image yesterday, nor will it be the same tomorrow.

Bruce Hoffman, Inside Terrorism, 2006, p. 295

Many nations have had to deal with domestic terrorism, some a great deal more than others. It is a predicament that affects every aspect of a nation’s social, political, and economic foundations. The longer the terrorist organization lasts, the greater the detriment to the nation and its people. There is no specific profile to help predict which terrorist organizations are going to last longer than others, but perhaps indicators can be gleaned from organizations that have lasted for decades. These indicators can then be applied to emergent terrorist organizations to hopefully prevent them from lasting as long. While there are a multitude of factors which could contribute to the longevity of a terrorist organization, this paper will look to determine whether adaptability is a contributing factor for longevity and which adaptability factors contributed to longevity?

Adaptability can be a very broad concept depending on how one chooses to look at it. According to Merriam-Webster, being adaptable is being “able to change or be changed in order to fit or work better in some situation or for some purpose” (Merriam-Webster, 2015, n.p.). Keeping this in mind, adaptability can be considered any action a terrorist organization takes to change their tactics, techniques, or procedures. For the purposes of this research, these actions and decisions need to change the circumstances of the terrorist organization in such a way that leads to the continuance of the organization. Many, if not most all, of the adaptive decisions
discussed in this paper can be seen as typical terrorist actions exhibited by numerous other terrorist organizations. Yet, most of these organizations were unable to sustain themselves anywhere as long as the well-known organizations, Basque Fatherland and Liberty (ETA) and Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK); indicating the decisions these two organizations, and others like them, made had something to do with their longevity. As will be shown, both ETA and PKK had strong leadership who made apt strategic decisions at just the right times and were even willing to alter policies when they proved to be more of a hindrance.

ETA and PKK have a many aspects in common, they are both Marxist-Leninist, ethnocultural, domestic organizations (Jane’s Online, 2013, 2014). ETA was formed by a group of disaffected Basque youths in 1959 during the Spanish dictator Francisco Franco’s reign (Alonso, 2011; Jane’s Online, 2013). PKK was formed nearly two decades later, in 1979, by a group of disgruntled, mostly Kurdish, university students in Turkey (Jane’s Online, 2014; Marcus, 2007b). Both the Basque and Kurdish populations suffered repressive measures in their respective nations: banned languages, suppressed cultures, and false imprisonment and torture for their beliefs (Barros & Gil-Alana, 2006; Jane’s Online, 2013, 2014; Marcus, 2007b). Both organizations desired to establish independent socialist nations in their respective homelands; the Basque in northern Spain and southwestern France and the Kurds in southeast Turkey (Barros & Gil-Alana, 2006; Jane’s Online, 2013, 2014; Marcus, 2007b). Over time, each organization evolved into one of the most sophisticated and dangerous paramilitary organizations engaged in urban combat, murder, extortion, kidnapping, and assassination in their respective regions (Jane’s Online, 2013, 2014). Today, despite being substantially weakened through coordinated Spanish and French counterterrorism efforts, which have nearly decapitated the organization, ETA has managed to become one of the longest-enduring terrorist organizations still active in
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Europe (Barros & Gil-Alana, 2006; Jane’s Online, 2013). Similarly, the PKK has managed to beat the odds; despite Turkish counterterrorism efforts, a move from Turkey to Syria, and the loss of its leader, the organization has become one of the longest-enduring terrorist organizations still active in the Middle East (Marcus, 2007a; Jane’s Online, 2014). The similarities do not stop there, as will be shown in this paper; both ETA and PKK employed very similar adaptive decisions at nearly the same points in their histories. Appendix A: General comparison of organizational characteristics provides a side-be-side comparison of ETA and PKK.

This study analyzed ETA and PKK, identifying points or trends in each organization’s history where they made adaptive decisions that enabled their longevity. In the course of the research, five main adaptive categories were identified. First, the paper examines the adaptive decisions each organization made during their early years and how those decisions facilitated their survival when others, particularly contemporary organizations, did not. Second, the paper looks at how dramatic changes in government forced the two organizations to change and how the choices they made allowed them to continue. Next, the paper explores the numerous alliances the two organizations made with various nations and organizations and how those alliances allowed the organizations to maintain strength and continue their cause. After that, the paper examines each organization’s descent into the criminal world and how these endeavors secured the necessary means for which both organizations were able to keep fighting. Finally, the paper looks at the various ways in which each organization went about garnering or maintaining the support of their respective populations, an essential aspect to continuing the fight. By identifying and understanding how long-term domestic terrorist organizations adapt to overcome certain situations, which eventually contributed to their longevity, we can attempt to apply those lessons learned to combating other terrorist organizations.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

Some terrorist organizations last much longer than others. The ability of these organizations to adapt over time to the changing circumstances around them is an important contributor to the longevity of the organizations. If an organization were not capable of adapting to such events as the loss of external supporters, changes in the political environment, changes in the adversary nation’s tactics, internal changes, or any number of other circumstances, then the organization would be susceptible to demise. This paper examined the role adaptability plays in contributing to the longevity of the Basque Fatherland and Liberty (ETA) and the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK). It is hypothesized that these long-term domestic terror organizations have lasted as long as they have in part through their ability to adapt to the changes, externally as well as internally, that have occurred during their lifespans or to anticipate needed changes. Due to their adaptability, these organizations and others like them are more likely to endure than those that do not adapt as well.

Longevity

In the past decade, a number of studies have been undertaken that specifically examine the longevity of terrorist organizations. Also in the past decade, a number of studies have been conducted on how terrorist organizations end, in which the longevity of these organizations was examined in order to determine factors that contributed to the demise of the organizations. In all of these studies, a variety of alternate terms were used to describe longevity such as survivability, sustainability, durability, life-cycle, staying power, persistence, and others. In the end, all of the terms reference the same concept, the capacity of a terrorist organization to survive and the factors that contribute to their longevity. These factors are as varied as the labels
for longevity, ranging from ideological motivations, public support, safe havens, operating areas, 
external support, and others. Despite, in the past decade, a number of quantitative and qualitative 
studies having been conducted, either directly or indirectly, on what factors promote longevity 
within a terrorist organization, there is limited consensus on which of those factors actually 
contribute to a terrorist organization’s longevity.

The earliest investigation into the topic of terrorist organization longevity can be found in 
David Rapoport’s (1984) seminal study of religious international terrorism, specifically the 
Thugs, Assassins, and Zealots, all of which existed long before al Qaida became a household 
name. In the study he states that each of these organizations “was much more durable and much 
more destructive than any modern [terrorist organization] has been” (Rapoport, 1984, p. 659). 
While Rapoport (1984) believes that the religious foundation of all three organizations is what 
mainly contributed to their longevity, he also notes there were a number of other contributing 
factors, which will be discussed later. A number of other quantitative studies appear to support 
Rapoport with their findings that on average religious based terrorist organizations tend to last 
longer than other ideological based organizations (Blomberg, Gaibulloev, & Sandler, 2011; 
Carter, 2012; Cronin, 2009; Gaibulloev & Sandler, 2013). In fact, Blomberg, Gaibulloev, and 
Sandler (2011) noted that religious based terrorism lasted on average about six years longer than 
other ideologies. Very few of these studies provide an explanation for why religious ideologies 
promote greater longevity in terrorist organizations than other ideologies. Perhaps it is because 
religious terrorists believe they are beholden to a higher power than the laws of man and that 
what they are doing is right and just in the eyes of their faith. Due to the nature of their campaign 
they are able to garner greater support within a likeminded community that sees these religious 
warriors as fighting on their side, more so than other ideologies.
Audrey Kurth Cronin (2006, 2009) states that while she believes religious ideologies have greater “staying power” than other ideologies; it is too soon to tell if their average life-span truly is longer since there is a lack of data regarding these modern day organizations. However, as Rapoport (1984) and Cronin (2006, 2009) note in their studies, historical examples such as the Thugs, Assassins, and Zealots can be used as good indications of the longevity that we may face with the religious based terror organizations of today. Religious ideologies likely have the greatest staying power since religion is the most tightly woven aspect in a society with the potential to generate a substantial amount of popular support enabling a multitude of ways for terror organizations to carry out their campaigns.

Other ideologies, such as ethno-nationalist/separatist were also noted as contributing factors to terrorist longevity but to a lesser degree than religious ideologies (Cronin, 2006, 2009; United States Institute of Peace, 1999). Conversely, Jodi Vittori’s (2009) analysis showed that all ideologies have as much chance of survival as any other, stating that “no matter how abhorrent the inspiration; someone will always embrace violence as a means to foster certain ideas” (p. 462). In other words, it is not the ideology, but rather the members that carry on the fight. Another aspect of ideological ties to longevity was noted by Cronin (2006), who stated, “the nature of a group’s ideology seems to have relevance to the cross-generational staying power of that group” (p. 23). In other words, the more deeply embedded the ideology is in the community, the more likely the terrorist campaign is to pass from one generation to another. She further states that failure to pass the “legacy” from one generation of terrorist leaders to the next is a prevalent cause for a terrorist organization’s decline (Cronin, 2006). This is significant for counterterrorism efforts since it may be possible for the chain of violence to be broken by appealing to the next generation.
Nearly all of the studies that discuss ideology emphasize support from the population as a contributing factor to the longevity of terrorist organizations, especially when that support is tied to religious and ethno-nationalist/separatist organizations (Cronin, 2006, 2009; Rapoport, 1984; the United States Institute of Peace, 1999). Rapoport’s (1984) research indicated that support from the population contributed to the sustainability of the historical religious terror organizations in his examination. Later studies also found popular support to be an important contributing factor; without the support of the local populace, whether passive or active, terrorist organizations found it more difficult to locate recruits, income, and supplies (Carter, 2012; Cronin, 2009; Gaibulloev & Sandler, 2013). If the populace of the same ideology is not behind the terror campaign, the organization would have limited support to continue (Cronin, 2009). Some studies indicated that certain regions, such as the Middle East and Africa, generate greater local support for a terrorist organization than others, because of their lack of counterterrorism efforts (Blomberg, Gaibulloev, & Sandler, 2011; Gaibulloev & Sandler, 2013).

In addition to support from the local population, there are a number of external sources that promote longevity in terrorist organizations: other terrorist organizations, state sponsorship, and safe havens. In one study it was found that the more collaboration a terrorist organization has with other terrorist organizations, the more likely it is to survive (Phillips, 2013). This was observed to be especially true for organizations located in challenging environments such as more capable and more autocratic states where support from others helped the most (Phillips, 2013). In his article, Rapoport (1984) also noted that collaborative relationships with other terrorist organizations benefited the Thugs, Assassins, and Zealots; moreover, passive state sponsorship provided these organizations with sanctuaries and safe passage in foreign lands. In contrast, David Carter’s (2012) study on state sponsorship of terrorist organizations and Vittori’s
(2009) study on autonomy of terrorist organizations revealed that the more involved a state sponsor is in the organization the more negatively that sponsorship will affect the fate of the organization; states providing the support can be influenced to reduce or forego support, or the state’s control over the group will cause it lose momentum. Carter (2012) also determined that those terrorist organizations afforded safe havens were less likely to survive while the lack of safe havens had little influence on survivorship either way. Contrary to Carter’s work, a couple of other studies note that safe havens in fact do contribute to the longevity of terrorist organizations. Rapoport (1984) believed safe havens, in addition to religious ideology, popular support, external support, and cooperative relationships, contributed to the longevity of the Thugs, Assassins, and Zealots to varying degrees. An article on transnational rebels, who exhibit many similarities to transnational terrorists, finds that access to foreign sanctuaries has a significant impact on the prolonging of conflict, since in most cases the adversary nation can do little about the rebels (terrorists) located in a foreign nation (Salehyan, 2007).

Counter to all the studies previously mentioned, Seth Jones and Martin Libicki’s (2008) statistical analysis “showed that there is no correlation between the duration of terrorist groups and ideological motivation, economic conditions, regime type, or the breadth of terrorist goals. The best single-factor correlation was with peak size,” but even that was minimal (p. 40). Since the focus of Jones and Libicki’s work was on how terrorist organizations end and only examined longevity factors as potential explanations for those endings, they did not provide further analysis on what factors might actually contribute to the longevity.

More credible are those studies that highlight a number of factors, rather than only one or two factors, as contributing to the longevity of terrorist organizations, such as can be seen in Rapoport’s (1984) article utilized extensively above. Another study by Blomberg, Engel, and
Sawyer (2010) on the sustainability of transnational terrorist organizations determined that an organization’s survivability increases in nations with larger populations and better economies, when the organization engages in greater levels of violence, and in nations that lack capable counterinsurgency institutions. In a third study, it was found that organizations that diversify their attacks, live in countries with larger populations, operate out of the Middle East or North Africa, are religiously focused, are larger in size, exist in democratic nations, or engage in a larger share of domestic attacks experienced greater longevity in varying degrees (Blomberg, Gaibulloev, & Sandler, 2011). A fourth study by Gaibulloev and Sandler (2013) found that terrorist organizations were more likely to have longer life-spans when they exhibited the following factors in varying degrees: larger group sizes, religiously based, multiple bases of operation, engaged in attack diversity, resided in the Middle East or North Africa, lived in democratic nations, or lived nations with large tropical territory. A final study by Young and Dugan (2014) revealed that a terrorist organization is more likely to survive if there is limited competition from other terrorist organizations in a region and if the organization is the “top dog.” They also noted that the “more the group kills, uses different kinds of attacks, targets multiple states, or uses the most costly forms of attack, the more likely it will survive longer” (Young & Dugan, 2014, p.16). Contrary to other studies, they found little to support the theory that democracy, terrain, or population promotes longevity. These studies highlight that multiple factors in varying combinations contribute to the longevity of an organization rather than just a couple of factors.

The conclusion that can be drawn for this research is that in the end there is no one factor, or couple of factors, that will propel a terrorist organization to greater longevity over another organization. While none of the studies explicitly stated it, the longevity of an organization will
be determined by the right factors for a particular organization coming together in the right way. What these factors are and how they happened to be the right ones are matters that need to be studied on a case by case basis. However, for the purposes of this paper, only one factor that has yet to be examined in all the proceeding research will be looked at and that is adaptability and how it contributes to the longevity of terrorist organizations.

Adaptability

Similar to the research on the longevity of terrorist organizations, research on the adaptability of terrorist organizations has also been limited and mostly conducted in the past decade. In fact, for the majority of the research the focus has been on aspects closely related to adaptability, but not specifically adaptability. Some studies looked at how organization’s change and adapt over time by focusing on a terrorist organization’s ability to learn, others focus on antiterrorism and counterterrorism efforts forcing change, and still others focus on reactions to various external changes such as political and economic factors. However, there has been a substantial amount of research on what has commonly been referred to as the crime-terror nexus, the merging and blending of traditional criminal and terrorist roles, illustrating one of the ways in which terrorist organizations are adapting to external changes.

A number of notable individuals in the terrorism and counterterrorism discipline mention aspects of terrorist adaptability, but none of them goes into any detail regarding why and how they are adapting. For instance, Bruce Hoffman (2006) alludes to terrorist adaptation when he talks about how terrorist organizations are continuously evolving to keep pace with technology. He states that “the terrorist campaign is like a shark in the water: it must keep moving forward—no matter how slowly or incrementally—or die” in reference to a terrorist organizations need to stay in the forefront of the media in order to promote their cause (Hoffman, 2006, p 234). In an
interview, Charles S. Faddis (2010) states that “terrorist organizations are adaptable and flexible…They will change their tactics and methods as they need to in order to accomplish their aims” (interview question 3). In an ongoing Stanford University project called *Mapping Militant Organizations*, Martha Crenshaw (2010) and others are looking to map various terrorist organizations to see how they interact with the government and other opposition groups across a prolonged timeframe. The project aspires to “identify distinct patterns of organizational evolution, as [militant] groups form, split, merge, collaborate, compete, shift ideological direction, adopt or renounce terrorism, grow, shrink, and eventually decline over time” (Crenshaw, 2010, p 1). These statements and the project acknowledge that terrorist organizations are constantly evolving and adapting to their surroundings, but their authors do not go into any detail as to the why, how, and outcomes of those changes.

Two studies noted that the ability of an organization to learn contributed to the adaptability of that organization and in turn the successfulness of the organization. In a RAND study, Brian Jackson, et al. (2005) conducted an examination of how terrorist organizations learn and how law enforcement and intelligence personnel can use that information to counter terrorism. This study essentially states that if a terrorist organization fails to learn, especially from past mistakes, then they are doomed to fail (Jackson, et al., 2005). The study also states that learning is a key contributor to an organization’s ability to adapt to any given situation (Jackson, et al., 2005). The greater the ability to learn, the greater the ability to adapt and therefore more lethal or successful an organization has the potential to be. While this seems intuitive, it is how the organizations learn that is important, which the study lays out in ample detail. In another study looking at terrorist weapon choices and the strategies used to employ the weapons, Brian Jackson and David Frelinger (2008) also noted that the ability of an organization to learn was
essential to organizational success. If the organizations failed to either learn a variety of weapons
types or failed to learn versatility with regard to a few weapons types, the organizations would
likely not do well (Jackson & Frelinger, 2008). In both studies, learning was the cornerstone to
adaptability. If terrorist organizations failed to learn then how could they adapt?

A number of studies assert that counterterrorism and antiterrorism efforts force terrorist
organizations to change and adapt in response to those efforts. One of those ways is through
substitution. Walter Enders and Todd Sandler (1993) made the case that government
counterterrorism and antiterrorism policies focused on reducing one attack method forced the
terrorists to substitute with another attack method. In a later study, Enders and Sandler (2004)
expanded upon the substitution effect, stating that in addition to substitution attack methods
terrorists also use complementary attack methods. Substitution is the use of one attack method in
place of the original attack method where complementary is the use of multiple attack methods
employed together to carry out the attack (Enders & Sandler, 2004). In a further expansion on the
topic, João Ricardo Faria (2006) divides substitution into innovation (using never before
employed attack methods, tactics, weapons, etc.) and diversification (changing attack methods).
Terrorist organizations use innovation and diversification in order to circumnavigate a
government’s counterterrorism and antiterrorism endeavors (Faria, 2006). Further, in two of the
studies a third division was noted, intertemporal, the moving up of planned attacks in retaliation
for counterterrorism and antiterrorism undertakings; the attacks then eventually subside returning
to previous norms (Enders & Sandler, 2004; Faria, 2006). While the substitution effect and its
derivatives are important aspects of how terrorist organizations change and adapt in response to a
government’s counterterrorism and antiterrorism efforts they are not the only strategies used.
A number of studies found that government counterterrorism and antiterrorism efforts affected how dark networks, illegal secretive organizations (i.e. terrorist organizations), structured themselves (Milward & Raab, 2006; Everton & Cunningham, 2011). The articles state that terrorist organizations, in response to various governmental efforts or hostile environments, will restructure to counter the efforts, in order to ensure security and become more difficult to target (Milward & Raab, 2006). In a more recent article, Kilberg (2012) also found that counterterrorism successes, target selection, and a number of internal and external factors will force a terrorist organization to restructure in order to survive. The article also noted that in more durable, prosperous, democratic nations the terrorist organizations are more likely to be decentralized and secretive whereas in nations with less of a counterterrorism capability the terrorist organizations are more likely be hierarchical (Kilberg, 2012). In all these studies, we see the terrorist organization adapting to what the nation is doing to them in order to survive; however other external factors also play a role in how they are shaped.

Terrorist organizations need to be flexible and adapt to changes in their environment involving such aspects as the economy, politics, strategy, and social issues or they will not survive long. Robert Brathwaite (2013) argued that terrorist organizations involved in territorial claims and in competition with other organizations are more likely to move toward politics and the electoral process because they believe the move will help them garner additional support and recruits to their cause. In Emin Gürses’ (2008) article looking at ethnically oriented terrorism, he claims that ethnic organizations may use changes in external factors such as economy, politics, strategy, and social issues to their advantage to seek change in society and as an opportunity to change their own objectives.
Other external factors such as technology and the information age play a huge role in how terrorist organizations are adapting and surviving. In 1999, John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt, predicted that “information-age threats are likely to be more diffuse, dispersed, nonlinear, multidimensional, and ambiguous than industrial-age threats,” and they are accurate in their prediction (p. 194). The information revolution is seeing an increase in networked organizations which, while becoming increasingly reliant on information and communications technology to operate, affords them new avenues of attack (Arquilla & Ronfeldt, 1999; Hoffman, 2006). These technological advances either force or allow terrorist organizations to adopt new ways of doing business or risk becoming obsolete. Cyberspace is another information age realm that is significantly contributing to changes in terrorist organizations, allowing the terrorists to avoid detection, congregate virtually, maintain security, and become more innovative than ever before (Coll & Glasser, 2005). Without a doubt, technology plays a key role in how terrorist organizations evolve and operate, but to what degree needs to be examined further.

In addition to technology, engagement in criminal activities is driving some significant changes in the terrorist world. The need for such things as funding, supplies, and smuggling routes is compelling many organizations to engage in criminal activities. For many terrorist organizations, the loss of state sponsorship has forced this turn to other avenues of funding of which the best way is turning out to be criminal activities (Makarenko, 2004; Perri & Brody 2011). Despite the turn to criminal activities, many terrorist organizations still maintain that their original political objectives remain; however the reality is that they have mutated and lost their way due to the efforts required to carry out the criminal activities consuming the majority of their time or for pure greed (Dishman, 2001; Makarenko, 2004; Perri & Brody, 2011; Resenthal, 2008). In a furtherance of this mutation of agendas, the terrorist organizations have had to make
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alliances. While Tamara Makarenko (2004) and Frank Perri and Richard Brody (2011) acknowledge that terrorist and criminal organizations make various alliances for various reasons, Makarenko, Chris Dishman (2001), and Justine Rosenthal (2008) argue that neither the criminal elements nor the terrorist organizations really want to be associated with or tied to one another, preferring to conduct all business in-house thus ensuring security, separation of agendas, and avoiding increased law enforcement attention. Rosenthal (2008) further states that “traditional” terrorist organizations, those not heavily involved in criminal activities, are willing to work with for-profit terrorists, but not with criminals, since they still maintain some portion of their original agenda, if in rhetoric only. Ultimately, what each end of the continuum, criminal and terrorist, prefers to do is learn from the others successes and failures (Makarenko, 2004; Perri & Brody, 2011). Regardless of how or why terrorists have turned to criminal activities, the fact is that many are. This means that they are adapting to the environment around them to meet their needs, but where is the line drawn between criminalist and terrorists?

While the previous studies have in some way touched on the adaptability of terrorist organizations, only the next couple of studies have specifically focused on terrorist organization adaptability. In another RAND study, Kim Cragin and Sarah Daly (2003) attempt to help policymakers identify which terrorist organizations present the greatest threat to the United States and what exploitable vulnerabilities they may have. They did this by examining the ways in which: Aum Shinrikyo, Hizballah, Jemaah Islamiyah, the Provisional IRA, and the Radical Environmentalist Movement have adapted and changed throughout their life-spans, trying to identify their vulnerabilities, and have concluded that organizations are most vulnerable during times of evolution or adaptation (Cragin & Daly, 2003). In their study, they assert that terrorist organizations are difficult to evaluate since they are ever changing and adapting, constantly
responding to the changes around them (Cragin & Daly, 2003). Although this study looks at adaptability, it does not specifically tie adaptability to the longevity of an organization. In an article most similar to this paper, Gillian Oak (2010) makes that leap when she examined the four adaptive phases of Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) and proposed a fifth one, stating that JI’s ability to adapt to the changing environment around them contributed to its survival. While Oak ties adaptability to the longevity of a terrorist organization, she is looking at transformations of a single organization and therefore cannot identify trends in adaptability that could be applied across multiple organizations, which this research hopes to do. Her study however, could contribute to the findings made in this paper.

External factors are not the only influencers on organizational adaptability; internal factors also play a role in whether or not a terrorist organization will adapt. According to Brathwaite (2013), a terrorist organization will be driven to adopt an electoral strategy as a result of organizational fractionalization and in order to raise recruitment levels and garner more moderate supporters. Unfortunately, this is the only literature found describing internal factors driving change in a terrorist organization. It is the belief of the author that internal factors can also have an impact on whether terrorist organizations adapt in order to survive.

Similar to the research on longevity, the research on adaptability shows that no one factor drives a terrorist organization to adopt change. Generally, terrorist organizations change in reaction to the environment around them, especially in response to factors such as changes in government policies and actions, need for funding and supplies, various environmental changes like technological and cyberspace, and to some degree internal changes, which have yet to be fully explored. Regardless of whether the driving force behind change is an external factor or internal factor, the point remains that in order to survive terrorist organizations must adapt.
Chapter 3

Methodology

While the reviewed sources seem to agree that terrorist organizations adapt and evolve over time, based on their environment and internal factors, no studies have focused on what specific adaptability factors one might identify as universally appearing across multiple terrorist organizations that would promote the longevity of those organizations. In other words, what types of adaptability themes exist across multiple long-term domestic terrorist organizations that directly contribute to the longevity of those organizations? The ability of some terrorist organizations, such as the Basque Fatherland and Liberty (ETA) and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) to continually adapt over time to changes in endogenous and exogenous circumstances has had a significant influence on their ability to last as long as they have. If a terrorist organization were not capable of learning and adapting to counterterrorism and antiterrorism measures, to changes in political and social whims, to technological advances, and to internal strife, then the organization would likely not last very long. It takes lots of communal, organizational, and leadership capacity to adapt to what one learns from successes, mistakes, new technologies, and changing environments; a capacity that many people and organizations, much less terrorist organizations in a secretive hostile environment, have difficulty with. So the fact that terrorist organizations like the ETA and PKK have been able to do this for decades attests to their remarkable drive and aptitude. This ability to adapt is what more than likely enables many long-term domestic terrorist organizations to survive for as long as they have.

Why Adaptability

During the initial stages of research, adaptability was only one of four factors that were to be examined as contributing to the longevity of terrorist organizations. The other three factors
were: government actions, group identity, and criminal enterprise. However, as the research process continued, it was determined that four factors may be too unwieldy for this study, so a theoretical examination of all four factors based on the research conducted up to that point was undertaken. Some simple considerations led to the selection of adaptability as the sole factor to be examined as contributing to the longevity of long-term domestic terrorist organizations.

In regards to government actions, arguments can be made that all terrorist organizations, regardless of type or motivation, face opposition from a government. They would have little reason to exist otherwise. Therefore government actions were reasoned to not be a factor in longevity. Same with group identity, all organizations have identities; otherwise they would never have started to begin with. Granted, the thought here was that specifically, the separatist nature of the organizations was what contributed to their longevity. This factor was rejected because, as will be seen, group identity can change over time and if that is the case then it would fall as a sub-set of adaptability. As for criminal activities, this too can be considered a sub-set of adaptability. The act of terrorist organizations turning to criminal activities is by nature an adaptive characteristic, which will also be noted later in this study. In the end, adaptability was chosen because it appeared to be a uniquely distinguishable factor of longevity that crossed various terrorist organizations.

**Case Selection**

A comparative case study approach was considered the best way to gain insight into how adaptability in some domestic terrorist organizations has led to greater longevity than in other organizations (Eisenhardt, 1989; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). The two long-term domestic terrorist cases selected for this undertaking were the previously mentioned ETA and PKK. The terrorist organization selection for this study was based on “theoretical sampling,” the concept
“that cases are selected because they are particularly suitable for illuminating and extending relationships and logic among constructs” (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007, p. 27). Additionally, the use of multiple-case studies allows for comparisons that can highlight whether a finding is specific to a single case or symptomatic across multiple cases (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Kreuger & Neuman, 2006). For this study the ETA and the PKK were selected based on their similarities in: ideologies, evolution, longevity, and the amount of data to be found on the organizations.

Each organization is considered a separatist movement (i.e., domestic terrorist organization desiring independence from the host nation), even if today they do not still desire full independence. Both organizations have experienced many similar situations in their pasts: peace and negotiation, intense fighting, collaboration and alliances, and criminal endeavors. Finally, both organizations have been in existence for greater than three decades: the ETA for 55 years and the PKK for 36 years (Jane’s Online, 2013, 2014). The significant amount of data to be found on these organizations increases the ability to accurately identify instances of adaptability through the capability to corroborate findings.

In addition to selecting these organizations based on their similarities, they were also chosen for their dissimilarities. According to Larry W. Kreuger and W. Lawrence Neuman (2006), the best way to generalize (find themes) in research is to, as much as possible, look at multiple diverse societies over a greater period of time, preferably from different time periods in history. For this study, the multiple cases and length of time are satisfied; however, the different time periods were discarded, as the author was looking for existing organizations to test the hypothesis. As for the diversity aspect, the two organizations satisfy this criterion based on their distinct linguistic, cultural, religious, ethnic, and geopolitical aspects. Refer to Appendix A:
General comparison of organizational characteristics, for a side-by-side comparison of some of the similarities and dissimilarities of the two organizations.

Granted, there are numerous other terrorist organizations which fit these criteria, but they are not as familiar to the author. Indeed, two other organizations, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) were considered for all the same reasons listed above, but were rejected, based on the estimate that four cases would be too unwieldy for the scope of this study. It was, therefore, decided that two terrorist organizations would be sufficient to establish whether or not adaptability factors contributed to the longevity of the organizations. As Cameron Thies (2002) notes, “qualitative analyses are usually performed on a small number of cases, or perhaps even a single case” (p. 352). A single case study was also rejected because there would be no way to corroborate data.

Data Collection

A comparative historical analysis approach was used for this study, examining almost exclusively published works such as academic journals and books. Using a spreadsheet, every source was first broken down by topic: general terrorism studies, longevity, adaptability, ETA, and PKK. Each source was then evaluated based on a rigorous review process looking at: the author’s credentials, publication details, publisher type, source type, scope of the source, intended audience, author’s objectivity, coverage, writing style, reviews of the work if a book, and the number of times the source was cited. Table 1: Evaluative criteria for source review shows the criteria used and the specific questions that were asked in order to determine the overall utility of each source. Once all the sources were examined, an overall assessment of the utility of each source to the study was applied. If a source was given a negative assessment, it was then discarded or held in reserve in case it was needed later in the study. Other than in a few
Table 1

*Evaluative criteria for source review*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Questions Asked</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Author’s credentials</td>
<td>1. What are the author's affiliation, background, experience, and publications?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Is the topic in the author's area of expertise?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Have instructors mentioned this author?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Has the author been cited in other sources?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>5. Is the author associated with a reputable institution or organization?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publication details</td>
<td>1. When was the source published?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Is it current or out-of-date for the topic?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Is it a first edition?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Publisher type</td>
<td>1. Is the publisher/journal scholarly or popular?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scope</td>
<td>1. What is the breadth of the source? Is it general or specific?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Does the breadth of the work match expectations?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Does the resource cover the right time period?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience</td>
<td>1. Is the publication aimed at specialized or general audiences?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2. Is the source too elementary, technical, advanced, or just right?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Objectivity</td>
<td>1. Is the information fact, opinion, or propaganda?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2. Is the information valid/well-researched or questionable/unsupported?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3. Are the ideas and arguments in line with other work?</td>
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<td>4. Is the point of view objective/impartial and is the language free of emotion</td>
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<td>and bias?</td>
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<td>5. Is a position argued; a philosophy advocated; associated with a position or</td>
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<td></td>
<td>advocacy group; conservative or progressive?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coverage</td>
<td>1. Does the work update, substantiate, or add information on the subject?</td>
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<td>2. Does it extensively or marginally cover thesis topic?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Writing style</td>
<td>1. Is the publication organized logically?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Are the main points clearly presented?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Is the text easily read, or stilted and choppy?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Is the author's argument repetitive?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reviews and citations</td>
<td>1. Is the source reviewed positively; considered a contribution?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Are better sources mentioned?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3. Do various reviewers agree on the value of the source or has it aroused</td>
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<td>controversy?</td>
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</table>
instances, nearly every source was scholarly, secondary, and current (within the last decade). In
the few instances where popular sources were used, they were found to be useful as summaries
and starting points for further research. The majority of the sources were secondary, since it
would be beyond the scope of this study to travel for interviews and very little firsthand
information is available to peruse. The older material used largely consisted of ground-breaking,
seminal works that others built their theories or later studies on.

Analytic Approach

Following the initial evaluation of the sources, a second, more thorough examination was
conducted in order to discover the prevalent themes for each, longevity and adaptability. As has
already been identified in the literature review, the research into the longevity of terrorist
organizations revealed the following themes: state sponsorship, ideology, population support,
operating area, cooperative relationships, and a number of other lesser attributes. The same was
then done for adaptability, finding the following themes: ability to learn, responses to
counterterrorism and antiterrorism efforts, responses to changes in environment (i.e., loss of
funding, technological advances, or government policies), and transition to criminal endeavors.
As mentioned previously, the adaptability themes noted here have not been linked to the
longevity of terrorist organizations.

In the next phase of the research, sources pertaining to the terrorist organizations were
examined in order to identify when the organizations appeared to adapt to a situation and what
scenarios brought on the adaptations. Using the comparative historical analysis methodology, a
number of endogenous and exogenous causal categories were identified (see Table 2: ETA and
PKK adaptive categories for a listing of the factors). Comparative historical analysis is a social
scientific methodology used to explain significant societal phenomena – such as terrorism, urban
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decay, political outcomes, growing poverty, and revolutions – through systematic comparison and historical analysis of processes that have far-reaching implications over time (Kreuger & Neuman, 2006; Mahoney, 2004; Mahoney & Rueschemeyer, 2003). In examining past cultural and social activities and diversities, a comparative historical analyst seeks to bolster theory building and conceptualization through causal analysis and the use of systematic, contextualized comparison in order to generate fresh concepts, expand perspectives, and provide substantial insights on difficult social issues (Kreuger & Neuman, 2006; Lange, 2012; Mahoney & Rueschemeyer, 2003). Bottom line, comparative historical researchers rearrange data to see activities in new ways (Kreuger & Neuman, 2006).

Table 2

**ETA and PKK adaptive categories**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adaptive categories</th>
<th>ETA and PKK actions</th>
</tr>
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</table>
| Formative years     | - Counter to other terror organizations, ETA and PKK both felt armed struggle was the only way  
|                     | - Counter to other Kurdish organizations, PKK focused on attracting the rural Kurdish population and eliminating competition |
| Regime changes      | - ETA switched to a “war of attrition” following the Spanish transition to democracy  
|                     | - PKK sought safety in Syria in advance of the Turkish military coup |
| Alliances           | - At varying times and for various reasons ETA and PKK sought alliances to aid in training, safety, funding, arms, supplies, etc. |
| Criminal endeavors  | - ETA and PKK turned to smuggling, extortion, drugs, and other criminal activities to generate funds |
| Ethnic support      | - ETA and PKK changed their tactics in order to generate recruits and support |
Comparative historical analysis can be applied to a variety of research types, which can be mixed and matched to meet the analyst’s requirements: single case, small-N, or large-N studies; a single point in time, across time, or contemporary studies; and qualitative or quantitative studies (Kreuger & Neuman, 2006; Lange, 2012; Mahoney, 2004; Mahoney & Rueschemeyer, 2003). This study uses a small-N, across time, qualitative combination; which according to Kreuger & Neuman (2006) is a common combination. Comparative historical analysis does not require a step-by-step process to carry out the research, nor does it typically require the use of complex or specialized techniques (Kreuger & Neuman, 2006). However, there are some general guidelines that should be followed (see Appendix B. Comparative historical research process). This process was followed for this study.
Chapter 4

Data analysis

Research into ETA and PKK highlighted five areas in which the two organizations exhibited adaptability decisions or actions likely leading to their longevity. The five areas are:

- The actions taken during *formative years* that were counter to what other organizations at the time were engaged in;
- The actions taken in anticipation of or to counter the implementation of a *regime change*;
- The *alliances* made in order to provide the organization with such things as safe havens, training, and supplies;
- The *criminal endeavors* engaged in order to secure financing;
- The continually changing strategies in an effort to boost *ethnic support* to supply recruits, money, security, and backing.

Refer to Table 2: *ETA and PKK adaptive categories*, for a description of these adaptive categories. As will be seen, both ETA and PKK took actions or made decisions that lie in each of these five adaptive categories.

**Formative Years**

Thorough research noted that both ETA and PKK made decisions early on that were counter to what their contemporaries were doing at the time. Each looked at the situation from a different lens and decided there was another, more effective way to achieve what they wanted. From the beginning, each felt armed conflict was the only way to have their voice heard. Additionally, PKK looked to recruit from a different portion of the Kurdish population than did other organizations involved in the Kurdish struggle.
Following ETA’s first act of violence on 18 July 1961, the failed attempt to derail a train carrying civil war veterans and supporters of Spanish Dictator Francisco Franco, the various ETA factions began to solidify their divergent views and after much negotiations split (Stubbs, 2012; Barros & Gil-Alana, 2006). By 1974, one faction thought armed struggle needed to be combined with politics and became ETApm (for political-military) while the other faction felt politics was a waste of time and devoted their efforts to armed struggle and became ETAm (for military) (Sánchez-Cuenca, 2007). As Sánchez-Cuenca (2007) noted “ETAm was right in considering that politics and armed struggle were not compatible” (p. 292). He further states that “ETApm, then the larger and more powerful organization, succumbed to electoral politics and renounced the use of violence in 1981” (Sánchez-Cuenca, 2007, p. 292). With ETApm’s renunciation of violence and decline into non-existence, ETAm eventually became known simply as ETA and continued its campaign of armed struggle.

PKK also believed engaging in armed struggle from the start was the only way forward. The organization’s leaders felt they had to offset the Kurdish fears in the wake of the Turkish crackdowns following the failed 1920s and 1930s Kurdish rebellions. They did this by taking “an aggressive approach that proved they were both committed and capable,” demonstrating they were serious about armed rebellion (Marcus, 2007a, p. 39). They felt their time was better spent starting armed rebellion immediately, to gather popular support, rather than spending time on court cases and publications (Alger, 2008; Marcus, 2007a). From the beginning, PKK attacked any rival organization it perceived to be an impediment to successful revolution or a potential threat to its claim as the sole representative of Kurdish nationalism (Jane’s Online, 2014; Marcus, 2007a; Marcus, 2012). The attacks on rivals were meant to demonstrate to the Kurdish population that the PKK were serious about liberating them (Marcus, 2007a).
Additionally, during its early evolution, the PKK focused its recruitment and support in the rural, lower class areas where the majority of the Kurdish population resided versus the urban educated Kurdish professionals and Turkish left that made up the other nationalist organizations (Institute for Counter-Terrorism, n.d.). In deciding to target the poor and illiterate, the PKK was able to forego the typical time consuming, costly propaganda publications the other organizations engaged in and focus more on direct interaction with the population in order to spread their word and gain support (Marcus, 2007a).

The situations ETA and PKK found themselves in early on and the decisions they made exhibited each organization’s ability to adapt and subsequently contributed to their longevity. ETA realized that to continue down a path of politics would mean the end of their armed struggle and little hope of gaining concessions for the Basque people. Conversely, to continue with armed struggle meant a chance of national and international support or at least hope that the Spanish government would finally grant the Basque people the concessions they have been fighting for. The same goes for the PKK; their targeted recruitment of the poor, oppressed Kurdish population gained them a large pool of potential rebels ready to fight for the cause since they had little to lose. The PKK’s decision to appeal to the Kurdish population most affected by Turkish oppression proved to be one of its finest moves. Similarly, the PKK’s forcible removal of any competition ensured that those fighters had no other option than the PKK if they ever hoped to gain their independence.

**Regime Changes**

Frequently, terrorist organizations are forced to adapt based on changes in the political environment. Early in their existence, both ETA and PKK found themselves in the midst of political turmoil in their respective host nations. Spain saw the death of Dictator Francisco
Franco and the return of democracy while Turkey experienced a military coup apparently staged in order to restore civil order to the democracy. In both cases, the terrorist organizations were forced to make adaptive decisions that would ensure the continuance of their armed struggle.

Initially, under the Franco regime, ETA operated under a strategy of “action-repression-action;” ETA would conduct a violent act, hoping the State would conduct a “disproportionately repressive response,” which would hopefully lead to greater popular support for the terrorist organization and thus fuel the popular insurrection (Sánchez-Cuenca, 2009, p. 4). This strategy did not work as hoped, as the Basque people did not rally behind the cause as expected (Sánchez-Cuenca, 2008). Then, in 1975, Dictator Francisco Franco died and Spain underwent a complete transformation of its social and political arenas as the State transitioned from dictatorship to democracy (Alonso, 2011). During this transition, the new Spanish government granted the Basque region fairly extensive autonomy in the 19 July 1979 “Estatuto de Gernika” statute in the form of “their own parliament, a regional police and judicial system and extensive financial autonomy” (Barros & Gil-Alana, 2006, p. 98). “An additional clause entitles the ‘Basque People’ to demand the restitution of other ‘historic rights’ within the framework of the Spanish Constitution” (Barros & Gil-Alana, 2006, p. 98). Yet, this was not enough for ETA.

A couple of circumstances at this point led ETA to make a major adaptive decision which ensured its continuance. The new Spanish Government’s concessions for the Basque region gave the organization the idea that full independence was achievable while ETA’s failure to rally the Basque population behind the cause forced the organization to rethink their approach (Gurses, 2008; Sánchez-Cuenca, 2008). With these two concepts in mind, a change in strategy was needed. The ETA decided to make the shift from an “action-repression-action” strategy and to a “war of attrition” strategy (LeFree, et al., 2012; Sánchez-Cuenca, 2007, 2008, 2009). The idea
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was “that if the cost inflicted on the State, in terms of human lives, financial extortion and property destruction, is sufficiently high [the State] will eventually give in” (Sánchez-Cuenca, 2009, p. 5). ETA was able to sustain this war of attrition: for 15 years; 1977-1981 were the bloodiest, most violent years, while 1982-1992 saw a lower level of steady-state violence (Sánchez-Cuenca, 2008, 2009). This strategy shift proved to be one of the most important adaptive decisions the ETA likely ever made.

Similarly, in the year leading up to the 12 September 1980 Turkish military coup, the PKK likely made one of its most crucial adaptive decisions ever: its move from Turkey to Syria and the Bekaa Valley in Lebanon. In one of his prison writings, Abdullah Ocalan (2009), the leader of the PKK, states that in 1979 he noted the first signs that a military coup was “imminent” and that “the PKK responded by withdrawing into the mountains or into other countries of the Middle East” (p. 26). In particular, a great deal of the PKK, including Ocalan himself, fled to Syria where they benefited from the protection of the Syrian government while at the same time a significant portion of the PKK also fled to Germany (Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d.). According to Songun (2009), the fact that the PKK was able to anticipate the coup and subsequently was able to remove a good portion of its members from Turkey prior to the coup was what made the organization “more powerful” than similar organizations. Those PKK and other right- and left-wing organization members still in Turkey at the time of the coup faced arrest and torture, particularly the Kurds, as the military placed increased bans on and further repressed all things Kurdish (Songun, 2009).

From the security of Damascus, Abdullah Ocalan was able to consolidate the PKK structure, setting himself up as its sole leader (Criss, 1995; Jane’s Online, 2014; Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d.). Ocalan also used this time to forge alliances with various Palestinian
and Iraqi Kurdish organizations in order to provide the PKK with needed training, arms, supplies, and safe havens, and to gain support and funding (Jane’s Online, 2014; Marcus, 2007a; Sahin, 2001). This time allowed the PKK to regroup and devise a way forward while living in relative freedom from attack by the Turkish military, who dared not cross national borders to deal with the PKK situation.

In the midst of these dynamic political environments, both ETA and PKK, were able to grasp the fundamental changes that were occurring within their respective nations and make the appropriate adaptive decisions which led to each organization’s continuance. For the ETA, that decision was the shift in strategy from attempting to force the Spanish government to overreact to ETA violence to trying to wear the government down with the amount and level of violence. While for the PKK, it was the strategic decision to flee Turkey in the face of a military coup, which enabled the organization to train and plan in relative freedom. For both organizations, these decisions would prove to be one of the most important adaptations they would likely make. They allowed both to weather the political storms each faced and come out the other side in better positions than perhaps they were before.

**Alliances**

Every nation, company, or organization forms alliances of one kind or another at some point in order to gain something that is their favor or mutually beneficial in some way. Terrorist organizations are no different; they often require associations, pacts, deals, or alliances with other organizations in order to maintain their existence. Some dealings are favorable and palatable while others may be counter to the organization’s ideology, nationalism, or religion. Many are taken on for the sake of what they bring to the table and quickly discarded once it is no longer needed or worthwhile. Regardless of the reason, these alliances can be a significant reason
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for why an organization manages to exist far longer than they would have otherwise. Alliances which provide training, funding, arms, and supplies in turn provide the organization with the required knowledge, capabilities, and tools to carry on despite any pressures the host nation may exert on the terrorist organization. Other nations which allow a terrorist organization to reside within its borders are effectively providing safety to the organization and are thereby contributing to the persistence of the organization. Whether intentional or not, these associations enable an organization to become more capable, thus contributing to their longevity.

For the ETA, most of these alliances and associations were both agreeable and beneficial. The ETA, at one time or another, has been known to work with other terrorist organizations such as the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) (Coker, 2003; Jane’s Online, 2013; Mees, 2001; Military Periscope, 2014). The IRA supported the ETA with tactics, bomb making skills, and weapons to such a point, that even after the IRA no longer provided support, many of ETA’s attacks mirrored IRA attacks (Jane’s Online, 2013; Woodworth, 2007). The IRA and ETA were also known to be linked through their respective political arms, Sinn Fein and Herri Batasuna (Jane’s Online, 2013; Woodworth, 2007). ETA’s alliance with the FARC has yielded significant support as well; providing mutual training, operational support, and revenue streams (Coker, 2003; Jane’s Online, 2013; Military Periscope, 2014). The associations with these two organizations makes sense, all three are nationalist organizations fighting similar battles with their respective host nations during the same time period.

Closer to home, the ETA sought support and safe havens from other Spanish and French Basque nationalist organizations (Durkin, 2011; Jane’s Online, 2013). But, perhaps the biggest support, came unwittingly from the French government. While there was no alliance or
agreement of any kind with the French government, the fact that the government turned a blind-eye to ETA activities in the southwest of France is in many ways a tacit agreement for the ETA to do as they please in the French Basque region. From France, the ETA was not only able to secure safety and support, but also a place to hide and store weapons, launch attacks against the Spanish government, as well as conduct training (Coker, 2003; Economist, 2004; Jane’s Online, 2013). Initially, the French government was unwilling to move against ETA for fear of motivating the French Basque into a similar armed struggle against France (Economist, 2004; Encarnacion, 2007). Similarly, other nations, whether willing or not, provided ETA with support. Lebanon, Libya, and Nicaragua were said to have provided training, while Cuba and Venezuela are said to have provided refuge (Jane’s Online, 2013; Military Periscope, 2014).

ETA took advantage of their alliances with like-minded, sympathetic organizations such as the IRA and FARC, sharing skills and knowledge which allowed the organizations to build on one another’s experiences rather than learning from trial and error. This allowed ETA to more competently carry out their armed struggle with the Spanish rather than being forced to struggle on their own. The inaction of France and other nations was a boon to ETA as well; they were able to remain relatively safe from the Spanish government for many years, which contributed to the continuance of ETA’s cause.

Similarly, the PKK sought safety with nations outside Turkey in order to avoid the Turkish military coup. Initially, the PKK turned south to Syria and west to Europe, in particular Germany, for safety. Syria meant the PKK would have access to safe havens, training camps, supplies, and protection from Turkish arrests and attacks, which in turn allowed the PKK to regroup and consolidate power in order to fight back (Jane’s Online, 2014; Marcus, 2007a). The move to various European nations allowed the PKK to establish financial, political, and
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propaganda networks (Casier, 2010; Jane’s Online, 2014; Marcus, 2007a). During this time, Ocalan made arrangements with several Palestinian organizations to provide the PKK with training in explosives, guerrilla warfare, staff officer, propaganda, and various other areas (Marcus, 2007a). Later on, as the PKK continued its fight with Turkey, Ocalan sought alliances with the Turkish left and opposition Iraqi Kurdish organizations in order to secure greater access to Turkey through closer training camps and safe havens in Iraq (Gurses, 2008; Jane’s Online, 2014; Marcus, 2007a; Van Bruinessen, 2000). Next, the PKK worked out loose agreements with Iran to use the Iranian Kurdish areas along the Iranian/Turkish border for the same purposes as in Iraq, proximity and safety (Jane’s Online, 2014; Marcus, 2007a; Van Bruinessen, 2000).

Eventually, most of these alliances broke down. As Gurses (2008) notes, “the PKK leadership is ready to shift alliances from one regional power (or any external power) to another as long as this contributes to the fulfillment of their aim” (p. 86). By time some of these alliances failed, the PKK were already well entrenched in the hash mountainous regions of Iraq and Iran and there was little the local governments or Kurdish organizations could do to oust them (Jane’s Online, 2014; Marcus, 2007a).

The PKK sought alliances with various nations and organizations in order to ensure its safety and preservation in the face of Turkish military and government opposition. While many of these alliances were with nations and organizations to Ocalan’s liking, not all were amicable. Nevertheless, Ocalan and the PKK made these less than desirable alliances in order to ensure the survival of the organization. Thus, Ocalan and the PKK, like many terrorist organizations, were capable of compromising on certain agendas in order to achieve the desired end state. In this case, the acquisition of training, safe havens, support, and strategically defensible fighting positions and hideouts in the Iraqi and Iranian mountains bordering Turkey.
Alliances are made out of need for something an organization cannot acquire themselves, whether it is for financial, safety, supplies, training or mutual support against a greater foe. Many of these alliances may not be agreeable, but are sought or dealt with out of necessity, meaning the organization was required to compromise on whom they were willing to deal with in order to acquire the needed resources. In some cases, the alliances with outside organizations did little to change the organization itself, like with the ETA. Conversely, with the PKK, the need for money drove the organization deep into the drug trade and various other criminal activities to the point it is difficult to tell if the organization is terrorist or criminal any more.

**Criminal Endeavors**

One of the biggest issues terrorist organizations face is funding. They require money to pay for everything: training, food, shelter, clothing, arms, munitions, operations, and so on. Predictably, very little of this funding is acquired legitimately. Often a terrorist organization finds themselves needing to turn to illegal means in order to gain funds as the only way to pay for these items. For many, these illegal ventures are counter to their ideology, but out of necessity they engage in the ventures. There are many ways terrorist organizations can obtain funds illegally: drug trafficking, arms smuggling, extortion, “taxation”, and others. Funding is not the only reason a terrorist organization engages in criminal activities: murder, violence, vandalism, and fear tactics are used to keep members from leaving the organization, to keep the local population in order, or to harass the local government. ETA and PKK are no different from any other terrorist organization in these regards.

Like any other terrorist organization, ETA needs funding, and like most other terrorist organizations, once they started having trouble acquiring the funds through legitimate means they turned to criminal methods. More often than not, the need for money and the need for arms
are merged, using the same smuggling routes. ETA has been known to rely on cigarette, drug, and arms smuggling to finance operations, while sourcing weapons from Latin America, the Middle East, various organized crime syndicates, as well as Eastern European groups (Coker, 2003; Jane’s Online, 2013). They have reportedly sold explosives and exchanged information on how to further obtain explosives and weapons with Islamist groups, as well as worked with the Italian mafia, delivering drugs in exchange for weapons (Jane’s Online, 2013; Military Periscope, 2014). Besides smuggling, ETA stole explosives and weapons in order to carry out attacks; stole various others items to resell for profit; and engaged in kidnappings, bank robberies, and extortion or “revolutionary tax” to garner additional funds (Jane’s Online, 2013). By 2013, Spanish security forces estimated that between 90 and 95 percent of ETA’s 2.5 million Euro budget came from the “revolutionary taxes” it exerted from businesses and individuals (Jane’s Online, 2013). While some terrorist organizations seem to have blurred the lines between terrorism and criminality, the ETA seems to have avoided this move thus far. They seem to have kept their original focus of nationalism and used criminal endeavors to forward that agenda.

The PKK on the other hand has submerged themselves in the criminal world; with the need for funding a constant burden, the PKK readily took advantage of their geographic locations in Europe and the Middle East. With an estimated 500,000 to 800,000 Kurdish immigrants living in Europe at any one point and Turkey being one of the major smuggling routes between the Middle East and Europe, the organization was in a prime position to dive into the transnational organized criminal world (Radu, 2001; Roth & Sever, 2007; Sahin, 2001). They engaged in nearly every kind of smuggling from drugs and arms to human trafficking in order to fund operations and support their members (Roth & Sever, 2007). Predominantly in Europe, the Kurds engaged in the collection of revolutionary taxes, or rather extortion, from Kurdish
businesses (Sahin, 2001). Recently, drug smuggling has become the PKK’s main criminal activity, bringing in the highest revenues (Roth & Sever, 2007; Sahin, 2001). While these funding streams most likely adequately cover PKK operations, the allure of the high pay-off from illegal ventures undoubtedly keeps PKK members heavily vested in the criminal world. That is to say, despite PKK being a nationalist organization with the one time goal of creating an independent Kurdish nation, the PKK is likely now one of the most criminally bound terrorist organizations.

Both ETA and PKK require a continuous stream of funding to finance operations and sustain their members, an amount that donations and legitimate endeavors alone could not sustain. Like most all terrorist organizations, both initially engaged in criminal activities to aid in funding their cause. As the costs rose, so too did the level of criminal activity. Both organizations engaged in extortions, smuggling, thefts, but PKK took it to the extreme. Today, PKK has engaged so deeply in the criminal and drug smuggling realms that other than their continued declaration of nationalism there is little to differentiate them from true criminal organizations. Meanwhile ETA has remained relatively true to its stated nationalist claims. In both cases, the turn to criminal activities demonstrates a capacity on the part of the organization to seek out and adapt to alternate ways of facilitating their cause.

**Ethnic Support**

ETA and PKK rely on the support of their ethnic populations, the Basques and Kurds respectively, to supply each organization with recruits, money, security, and backing. Problem is, getting the ethnic population to back an organization which uses armed struggle as the means to their ends is no easy task. In general, most people are against the use of violence for any reason. However, if the conditions are right, just enough will think the fight worth the cost and help in
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whatever ways they can with such matters as supplies, safe places to stay, money, or actual participation in operations. Often this is not enough and organizations are sometimes forced to resort to drastic measures to bring in new recruits, arms, and funds. However, a terrorist organization needs to be mindful of how forceful they are with the ethnic population. If they take it too far, they could end up losing their entire support base and thus losing the overall fight.

Early on, ETA seems to have had no problem garnering support from its ethnic population, both in Spain and in France. As Joseph Ernst (2000) points out “the Basque culture is one of the oldest in Europe and has developed both a unique set of cultural characteristics and a deep tradition that is firmly embedded in Basque society” as such the organization was “able to capitalize on this strong sense of collective identity and turn it into both members and support for the group and its actions” (p. 30). However, as the armed struggle continued, with no end in sight, ETA was obliged to look for alternate means of keeping the ethnic population supportive of the organization. At various points in its history, ETA murdered those who desired to leave the organization, as well as engaged in violence and intimidation in order to coerce portions of the Basque population who were not supportive of ETA into helping the organization (Alonso, 2011; Alonso & Reinares, 2005). As recruitment began to wane, ETA turned to the Basque youth gangs involved in kale borraka (street struggle or civil disorder) to fill the ranks of ETA and support Basque nationalism (Durkin, 2011; Encarnacion, 2007; Jane’s Online, 2013; Woodworth, 2002). The involvement in the street gangs was seen as a stepping stone for recruitment of new ETA members (Encarnacion, 2007). However, many of those involved in the youth gangs lacked discipline, were poorly trained, and were known to the Spanish security forces, all of which served to dilute the quality and success of the ETA (Jane’s Online, 2013). While the adaptive measures used to generate support and recruitment saw some success in the
short-term, in the long-term they would prove to be poor choices owing to the fact that the use of fear to intimidate a population is never an effective recruitment tool nor is sacrificing quality.

In the 1980’s the PKK, and in particular Abdullah Ocalan, employed some rather severe undertakings in order to gain recruits, garner civilian support, and dissuade dissenters. Throughout the early-1980s, the PKK engaged in the murders of civilian Kurds and dissenters. The murder of dissenters was supposed to show that the PKK was strong enough to fight the Turkish state, while the murder of passives or those working for the Turkish was meant to dissuade Kurds from siding with the enemy (Criss, 1995). Later, during the PKK’s 3rd Congress, held in 1986, several inflammatory decisions such as conscription, recruitment kidnapping, and forced taxation were directed as measures that would bolster the PKK’s control of the region and generate membership, when in fact these measures turned much of the Kurdish population against the PKK (Criss, 1995; Marcus, 2007a). Seeing the negative impact these measures had on the people’s support of the PKK, the organization decided to abandon many of them (Marcus, 2007a). Thus, “the PKK’s willingness to take into account the demands and criticisms of the people it wanted to represent was an important factor in the group’s growing popularity” (Marcus, 2007a, p 119). The PKK initially made adaptive decisions which they thought would increase their membership and support; however, as they soon learned, these measure actually turned out to have a negative impact on the PKK’s popularity. In response the organization reversed or lessened some of the more severe measures in order to gain back their popularity.

As a nationalistic armed struggle continues with little positive return for their efforts, the ethnic population’s support begins to wane. In turn, the terrorist organization seeks drastic measures to bolster their membership and support, even if this mean sacrificing quality for quantity as in the case of ETA or resorting to extreme measures as the PKK did. Both
organizations soon learned that their practices were having negative impacts and sought to reverse their previous decisions. In these instances, one can see that both organizations first adapted to the loss of ethnic support, and made poor decisions to recoup the support and when those decisions proved to be flawed, they further adapted and reversed some of their decisions in order to maintain ethnic support of the cause.

The five categories discussed here underscore ETA’s and PKK’s abilities to make practical adaptive decisions when faced with formidable circumstances. These adaptive decisions ultimately contributed to each organization’s longevity. By doing this, both ETA and PKK were able to overcome many of the issues which typically bring down a terrorist organization in the course of its existence. They survived the tumultuous formative years when a terrorist organization’s survival is most vulnerable by make themselves relevant to the people. Both organizations anticipated major regime changes and rendered strategic decisions which carried them through those upheavals. Each organization made several alliances which allowed them to gain much needed training and security thereby improving the overall situation of the organization and carrying them forward. In their never ending search for funding both organizations turned to various criminal endeavors in order to earn those funds, which then enabled them to procure arms, training, and other items to support the members. Finally, and perhaps most critically, both organizations require the continuous support of their ethnic populations, without which they would lose membership, safety, funds, and the reason to fight.
Chapter 5

Conclusion

_The terrorist campaign is like a shark in the water: it must keep moving forward—no matter how slowly or incrementally—or die._

Bruce Hoffman, _Inside Terrorism_, 2006, p. 234

This paper examines whether the ability of a terrorist organization to adapt to certain situations contributed to their longevity. The research into ETA and PKK indicates that these two organizations made significant adaptive decisions in five main areas: formative years, regime changes, alliances, criminal endeavors, and ethnic support. The ultimate goal of the research is to learn if the adaptive factors found here can be used to examine more recent terrorist organizations and prevent them from lasting as long as the ETA, PKK, and others like them.

Early in their histories, each organization encountered situations which forced them to make decisions and act counter to what their counterparts were doing at the time. ETA’s early recognition that armed struggle and not politics was the only way to keep the Basque cause alive was well founded as evidenced by ETApm’s virtual disappearance from the Basque cause following their move to politics. Similarly, the PKK’s decision to appeal to the large rural, poor, oppressed segment of the Kurdish population vice the smaller, educated Kurdish, and Leftist populations living in the cities proved to be the right decision. The larger, incensed Kurdish population provided a greater number of recruits who had little if anything to lose from the beginning. Of course, PKK’s brutal removal of any competition only helped their cause, leaving the Kurds no other choice if they wished to fight. The initial adaptive decisions of these two organizations enabled them to survive the vulnerable early years.
The next phase in both organizations’ histories saw them faced with changing political environments. During the time of the Spanish transition to democracy, ETA recognized their strategy to force the Spanish government to overreact to ETA actions and thus increase the people’s support of the ETA was not working. They then switched to a strategy of attrition whereby they hoped to slowly wear the Spanish government down in hopes of forcing the concessions. While the change may have allowed ETA to carry on longer, it certainly did not gain them the concessions they desired. Likewise, PKK anticipated a major shift in the Turkish government, the military coup, allowing the majority of the members to flee the country in time. This flight allowed the PKK not only to survive the Turkish coup and subsequent round-up of dissidents, but also to put the organization in a better position to make alliances for safe haven, training, and arms, all of which undoubtedly allowed the PKK to survive. If they had not escaped Turkey, it is likely they would have been rounded-up, decimating the organization.

As the organizations started to gain their footing, growing in numbers and support, and the national governments began seriously countering the threat they posed, each organization began developing numerous alliances. They made these alliances with a variety of entities: nations, terrorist organizations, and criminal organizations. For both organizations, these alliances afforded them financial, logistical, safety, supply, and training support. If they had not been able to make these alliances and gain the needed resources, both organizations would have, in all likelihood, ended by now if not sooner.

Operations and personnel sustainment require a significant budget to maintain, more than what most terrorist organizations can bring in from supporters and legitimate revenue streams. This need for revenue drove both ETA and PKK to criminal endeavors such as extortion, smuggling, robbery, and theft to make up the difference. In fact, the PKK delved so far into the
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criminal world that today there is little difference between them and many criminal organizations. Regardless of how criminal the organization has become, the fact remains if each had not turned to illicit financial means they would have disappeared from lack of funding.

As with any armed struggle, the longer it lasts the more likely the supportive population is to abandon the cause. People lose interest, the fight becomes too violent or costly, the ideology has morphed, or any number of other reasons drive them away. In order to counter this, ETA and PKK sought out new ways to bring the population back to their cause. At first, they tried extreme measures such as force, violence, and threats. When they realized those measures were in fact hurting the organizations more than helping, they adapted again with more conciliatory policies that would bring the populations back to the cause. These adaptive measures show that, to some degree, the terrorist organization will accommodate the population in order to gain their support.

Ultimately, this research demonstrated ETA’s and PKK’s ability to adapt to the many difficult situations they faced and overcome them with sufficient actions allowing them to continue their fight. Understanding how and why certain terrorist organizations last as long as they do can benefit counterterrorism studies. Granted, like people, no two terrorist organizations are alike; each is influenced by its own set of cultures, personalities, ideologies, geographies, etc., thus making it difficult to apply a blanket set of parameters to all organizations. However, if we recognize in emergent terrorist organizations those activities which have been identified as key adaptive decisions in past organizations, perhaps this could aid governments and law enforcement entities in taking appropriate measures to halt the course of the new organizations.

Further Research

As the term adaptability can be interpreted broadly, even adding the caveat that adaptable actions must result in “the continuance of the terrorist organization,” still allows for a fairly
broad interpretation. This suggests there are a multitude of avenues one can examine to see whether adaptability contributed to the longevity of terrorist organizations. The scope of this research did not allow the examination of alternative perspectives for “adaptability.” The following are some areas noted during the course of the research into the paper. Do terrorist organizations shift ideology in order to appeal to a wider audience or revive interest from the target population? Are ceasefires and political maneuverings used by organizations to bide their time, regroup, maintain support, gain concessions, or appeal to a less violent faction of the target population? Do terrorist organizations change their targets and tactics in order to affect support, politics, or host nation decisions? To what degree does constantly improving technology change how a terrorist organization evolves? Additional research, applying the five categories will enhance the understanding as to the role of “adaptability” in terrorist organization longevity.

There are two other areas where further research will substantially clarify why some terrorist organizations endure when others collapse or fade into relative obscurity. Extending the methodology to a larger set of terrorist organizations, beyond the two in this thesis, is a promising course of action to assess the viability of the thesis premise. There are a significant number of organizations which could be used to expand research including, but not limited to, The Red Army Faction, PIRA, Black September, Hezbollah, and al Qaeda. Expanding the set of criteria also supports a more robust understanding of why some terrorist organizations survive while others fail. Examples of additional criteria for further research include financial support, ideology, organization objectives, technology, targeting, tactics, and political maneuvering. Even though each terrorist organization is unique in character and situation, expanding the research base will further define and clarify those characteristics and trends that are common for this class of organizations.
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**Appendices**

**Appendix A**

*General comparison of organizational characteristics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>ETA&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt; (Basque: Euskadi Ta Askatasuna, English: Basque Fatherland and Liberty)</th>
<th>PKK&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt; (Kurdish: Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan, English: Kurdistan Workers' Party)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Active</td>
<td>1959 (55 years)</td>
<td>1978 (36 years)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideology and platform</td>
<td>Marxist-Leninist / Domestic Ethnocultural Separatant</td>
<td>Originally Marxist-Leninist; later nationalist separatist; today Domestic Ethnocultural Reformist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goals</td>
<td>Independent Basque socialist state in N Spain and SW France</td>
<td>Originally establish left-wing Kurdish state; then independence; today cultural and political rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aliases</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Kurdistan Freedom and Democracy Congress (KADEK) and Kurdistan People's Congress (KONGRA-GEL)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current strength</td>
<td>30-200 full members</td>
<td>5,000 to 7,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First terrorist act</td>
<td>1961 failed train attack; 1968 claimed 1st victim</td>
<td>1984 began armed conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious affiliation</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Recently turned to Islam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political factions</td>
<td>Batasuna (formerly Herri Batasuna)</td>
<td>Kurdistan People's Congress (KONGRA-GEL and KCK)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Militant factions</td>
<td>Youth squads (such as Jarrai, Haika and Segi)</td>
<td>People's Defense Force (HPG)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminal activities</td>
<td>Extortion, kidnapping, bank robbery, and weapons trafficking</td>
<td>Extortion, narcotics, propaganda and fundraising in Europe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training</td>
<td>Northern Ireland, France, Lebanon, Libya, and Nicaragua</td>
<td>Syria, Syrian-controlled areas of Lebanon, Iran, and Greece</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>1</sup> Jane’s Online. (2013, October).

<sup>2</sup> Jane’s Online. (2014, February).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Long-term domestic terror organization</th>
<th>ETA(^1) (Basque: Euskadi Ta Askatasuna, English: Basque Fatherland and Liberty)</th>
<th>PKK(^2) (Kurdish: Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan, English: Kurdistan Workers' Party)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Characteristics</strong></td>
<td>Murder, extortion, kidnapping, bombing, assault, assassination, and general harassment</td>
<td>Small-unit ambushes and assaults using small-arms, bombs, and heavy weapons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terrorist activities</td>
<td>Politicians, public figures, journalists, security forces and recently tourism</td>
<td>Turkish law enforcement and military; Turkish targets in Europe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Targets</td>
<td>PIRA, Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), various Islamist groups (Iran and Lebanon), several French Basque movements and links to Latin America</td>
<td>Kurdistan Freedom Falcons (TAK), Kurdistan Free Life Party (PJAK), Kurdistan Freedom Falcons (TAK), Revolutionary People's Liberation Party/Front (DHKP/C), and various Iraqi and Syrian Kurdish groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allies</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Syria active support 1980s-1998; Iran passive support 1990s-2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>A dispersed leadership with 11 main branches and numerous small autonomous cells</td>
<td>Since 2005, run by a top-down legislative hierarchical structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public support</td>
<td>Declined as Basques gain more rights under Spanish democracy</td>
<td>Kurdish diaspora in the Caucasus, Russia, North America, and many European countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latest cease-fire</td>
<td>January 2011 (still in effect)</td>
<td>No current cease-fire in effect (last one was March 2013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment &amp; mobilization</td>
<td>Local Basque media and active radical youth organizations</td>
<td>Multi-media, non-governmental organizations and Kurdish political parties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female fighters</td>
<td>Significant numbers</td>
<td>Significant numbers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-government opposition</td>
<td>Various groups denouncing political violence</td>
<td>Turkish Hizbullah</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B

Comparative historical research process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Steps</th>
<th>Actions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conceptualizing the object of inquiry</td>
<td>Start with a loose model or set of preliminary concepts and apply them to a specific setting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locating evidence</td>
<td>Locate and gather evidence through extensive research.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluating quality of evidence</td>
<td>Ask how relevant is the evidence to emerging research and evolving concepts and how accurate and strong is the evidence?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizing evidence</td>
<td>Begin by noting generalizations or themes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synthesizing</td>
<td>Refine concepts and move toward a general explanatory model after the evidence is in, revising or creating new themes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing a report</td>
<td>Distill evidence into exposition, weaving together evidence and arguments to communicate a coherent, convincing picture.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Table adapted from Larry W. Kreuger and W. Lawrence Neuman’s work: Social Work Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches: with Research Navigator.